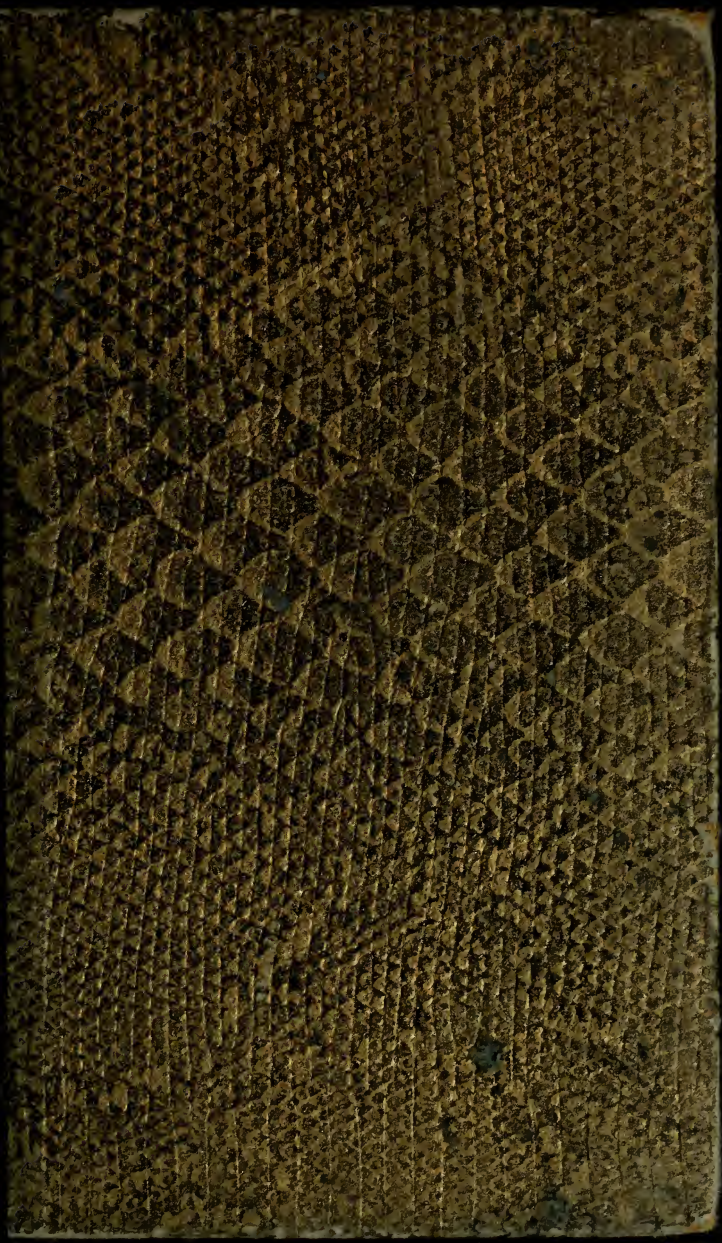

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A TRIP TO NEW YORK

A
TRIP TO NEW YORK
and a Poem

BY

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FRONTISPIECE WOOD-CUT BY GEORGE BISSILL

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To
M.S.H.

BAZIN—AND AT NEW YORK

Regard this scene ! Is it not terrible to see these mountains
sombre and storm-bound
Behind the window-pane of a Bond Street dealer !

He is not inside but lives in New York, beyond the
Atlantic
He has a flat on the top of a sky-scraper but his windows
are heavily curtained
And on his walls are landscapes, all the moods of nature
Mirrored by French Impressionists, by Cézanne, and
by Gauguin.

It is the stillness that is remarkable, do you not notice ?
The stillness of storm, of water, of cloud and forest,
Mountains—lightning-wandered without a flicker,
Purpled with the shadow of thunder.

On his carpet the foot falls silently
The light everywhere is light reflected.
Outside, far-off, there burns a Star
Shrivelling the eyeballs, but here remembered and
recollected
Into pools of tranquillity—the minds of dead artists,
Moons shining from the walls
Lit by dead fires of emotion.

But no orb rises among these mountains
In the absence of the living.

Rapture of crystallization
Shut in the hollow of a skyscraper
Sparkling like salt in the daylight !
Cities of salt by the seaside
Exuded out of mind and matter
Bright shells their strange geometry
Shells of the microbe within,
This Bond Street dealer living like a bookworm
Among the visions of the dead !

Whose Countenance sits waiting among the mountains
Frozen upon rocks ?
It is not day there nor night nor early evening.

Image of the sun sitting in an antique chair
Surrounded by the moon-dead
By Monet and Manet,
Handling the small flames of volcanoes
Petrified in his collection of rubies—
The waves of the Atlantic and the Pacific
Move no more but are like shells silent
Memory of the sea !

Thou glow-worm of the everlasting *Burning*
Among these cooled images,
Images of instantaneous lightning,
Sleep on completely circled
O *Moon !*

A Trip to New York

I

I BELIEVE every European will admit that to travel West is an even greater adventure than to travel East and that for him there is no thrill at the end of any voyage upon this planet like the thrill at the first sight of New York rising like a bed of rock crystals out of the sea, a veritable city of a New World. But, before this happens, the traveller will have had many foretastes and savourings of what awaits him on the other side of the Atlantic.

In the first place, he will have bought

an American trunk. If he is a hardened traveller, a man used to vexations and difficulties, he will only do this the day before he sails and he will choose one of those miracles of compactness—a trunk which stands upright, can be pushed along on rollers, fits in beside the driver of a taxi (American or English, for taxis, fortunately, are standardized), and will hold half-a-dozen suits, a dinner-jacket, a dress coat—all hung as perfectly as in a wardrobe—together with the impedimenta necessary for a voyage round the world, placed in drawers and cupboards, so easily accessible that he need never unpack during his whole journey.

And, in this trunk, if he only knew, he might at once see the microcosm of the New World, for the chief and, perhaps,

most startling characteristic of that world is that there the traveller never once unpacks in his voyage through life. In New York there are no homes, only apartments, and these apartments (which we would call flats) are nothing but elaborate trunks on a grand scale ; family trunks, trunks which hold the wardrobe and the toilet accessories of an entire household, arranged with the utmost economy of space and in the most meticulous order. What is the most striking difference between a trunk and a house ? Surely its front door. A trunk has no front door, neither has a New York apartment. By the aid of some magical machinery you are suddenly within its spotless, dustless, uninhabited interior, and there you silently sit down upon one of

the chairs which seem to be unobtrusively screwed into their places. Nothing is untidy, out of place, imperfect, or shabby; and, on the other hand, nothing is brand-new, vulgar, or ostentatious. There is a Monet upon one wall, an Odilon Redon upon another; there are books neither dusty nor unread; there are magazines and reviews all arranged as in a club so that you can take in their titles at a glance; there are flowers very still-life and artificial; and there are even children who appear noiselessly with their governess, exchange the customary greetings with the simple naturalness of a well-oiled spring, and depart with a disciplined freedom beside which the behaviour of any European child would appear either rigid or slap-dash.

To get into this self-contained interior —spacious in its miraculous efficiency— you have to pass the janitor at the ground-floor entrance to a building perhaps thirty stories high. The building will be necessarily in Park Avenue, the correct residential street in New York where more than one thousand millionaires live. The exact figure is known to all who have anything to sell. It is given in numerous magazines where advertisers are informed exactly in round dollars how much buying power is concentrated in Park Avenue and how that buying power is normally distributed—so much on soap, so much on flowers, so much on antiques, so much on automobiles, so much on theatre tickets—all carefully and, I presume, accurately tabulated down to the last cent.

But you are not admitted to these sacred interiors, these American domestic hearths, in the simple manner in which you make a London call. You are stopped by a janitor, to whom, indeed, you must go since all you have as an address in New York is the street number. You ask for the lady you are visiting; the janitor communicates with her by telephone, and you are then taken in an elevator which moves like a flash of noiseless lightning and deposits you in a small space surrounded by doors without names, numbers, or signs of any description. Even if you had managed to get to this spot unaided you would be utterly at a loss within that blank, unornamented, knockerless parallelogram of doors whose lines hardly break the smooth surface of the surrounding

walls. There are no stairs and without the elevator you would be completely imprisoned. But the janitor knows the door and presses upon a scarcely perceptible button. A man or a maid servant opens and you are let in. The elevator fades into the distance and you have stepped from outside that smooth meaningless trunk into the midst of its compactly concentrated service interior, where, indeed, you feel that you are just one utensil more, for whom exactly the requisite space has been allowed.

II

And everything in contact with America is approximating to the trunk ideal, for when you step on board the ship at Southampton you feel that you and your trunk are being fitted into a larger floating trunk. Such huge liners as the *Majestic*, the *Mauretania*, and the *Berengaria* have ceased to have the character of ships. You wander down their spacious corridors, lie down and rest upon a large couch in your stateroom, swim in a columned "Roman" bath that would have been one of the world's wonders in the days of Nero, or dance in a lounge that is indistinguishable from that of a first-class hotel—all unconscious that you are in the middle of

the Atlantic with nothing between you and the bottom of the sea but a few steel plates. Many passengers remain in their elaborate suites for the whole voyage of five or six days and could not tell that they were not still residing at the " Ritz," London, the " Meurice," Paris, the " Sacher," Vienna, or the " Adlon," Berlin, were it not for the fact that in this Atlantic megalopolis the waiters are called stewards. After lunch, to get an impression that you are on board a ship, you must take the lift from the dining-room on F deck to B deck, climb upon A deck and from the gaps between the boats peer at the surrounding sea and look up at the gigantic funnels sending up their wisps of oil smoke. The captains of these floating hotels are still in a sense seamen and possess master-

mariner's certificates ; but they are in effect business potentates with autocratic powers, industrial directors whose job it is to keep down the consumption of oil and run their sea-hotel to show a good profit. The old easy-going familiarity of a ship's company is also gone for ever. You would no more think of going up and speaking to a stranger than you would in a hotel lounge. New and strange faces are visible every day, and before landing unknown people appear in quantities out of the depth of the ship. A few deck games are played, but generally by children, or the rag and bobtail end of the passenger list. The gymnasium is chiefly resorted to by corpulent men and women trying to keep down their weight and by a few energetic young readers of newspaper sporting

columns. During my homeward voyage only one fair-haired Yale or Princeton athlete came into the gymnasium. He rowed, fenced, boxed, punched the ball, swung the clubs, used the chest-expander, and then passed from the camel to the horse, getting more and more purple in the face at every stage until at last the gymnasium instructor told him that he had better stop. Just then the lunch bugle call sounded whereupon he left the gymnasium thoroughly exhausted to go down and stuff himself to repletion.

No wonder the American insurance companies are getting alarmed and fear a sudden rise in the death-rate. The craze for athletics and the over-eating which accompanies it plays havoc with the faces and bodies of large numbers of American

men, making them look like comic advertisements for pneumatic tyres. Many of them seem to have acquired rubber-lined interiors and have rid themselves of the inconvenience of a discriminating palate. This enables them to perform such feats as the one I witnessed regularly at breakfast, when upon the same plate a man used to eat bacon and eggs, buckwheat cakes and maple syrup all beautifully mixed together. The consumption of sugar in America is about 112 lb. per head —almost twice as large as that of the country in the world with the second highest consumption. There are doctors who declare that the sugar saturation point has been reached and that this high sugar consumption is really dangerous; but Americans love danger and thrive upon it,

and five times a day on board ship there was a rush to the danger zone, where everybody distinguished himself, eating with the utmost valour and with an heroic disregard of consequences. And there were no casualties.

III

The great majority of Americans returning home from Europe get on the boat at Cherbourg and there one has one's first glimpse of the women of America *en masse*, for in spite of their numbers Europe is still large enough to scatter them through its cities and towns, whilst even in Paris the American invasion is less concentrated and impressive than when—crowded upon two furiously smoking tenders—it rushes towards the great Cunard or White Star liner lying in Cherbourg harbour.

From the heights above I watched this mass squeezing into narrow files up the gangways and separating out into women, women, women, with here and there a

man looking as odd and strange as a centaur. And, if I had known it, I had here the first indication of the truth I was later to discover: that the name of the New World across the Atlantic should be not America but "Amazonia." The women of America come to physical maturity at an early age, but, unlike Eastern and South European women, they retain their youth, for it is preserved by a simultaneous intellectual development. At sixteen they are often well-educated and sophisticated women of the world, compared with whom the young men of from sixteen to twenty-five—with the exception of a few precocious Jews—are mere babes and sucklings. On one occasion I danced with a charming young American girl, listened to her admirable

criticism of Marcel Proust, accepted her suggestion of a midnight walk on deck under the stars, watched with pleasure the self-possessed grace with which she threw a shawl across her shoulders, was amused by her contemptuous account of what the Americans call " necking parties," admired her dignity, good breeding, and naturalness, delighted in the combination of courage, straightforwardness, frankness, and delicacy which made flirtation with her not only impossible but inconceivable, and then learned that this superb young Diana was *fourteen years of age*.

American women habitually travel alone from a very early age. Young married women think nothing of spending from six months to two years in Europe away from their husbands and families. In fact,

America or, as we might agree to call that most important part of it and the one with which I am concerned, " Amazonia," is a country entirely dominated by women. It is the women who read ninety per cent. of the books and periodicals; it is the women who travel and learn to speak two or three foreign languages; it is the women who go outside their city boundaries and acquire and transmit European culture to the new generations; it is the women who direct the whole social and intellectual life of the country from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and if it were not for its women the United States would be a mere wilderness of Babbitts.

I would go further and express a new and, perhaps, a quite surprising idea. It would be possible without very much

distortion to depict America as offering something analogous to the harem system of Asia but reversed ; for in America it is the men who are in the harem. The American man is kept for breeding and for making money ; he has no real part in the social, intellectual, and spiritual life of the country. All day long and often far into the night he sits at his desk or rushes through the streets like an automaton. He is a smaller or a greater cog or, at best, a dynamo in the industrial machine, and he is kept blindly in motion by the ceaseless pressure of the industrial system whose only goal is the filling of every square mile of the continent with farms, factories, or skyscrapers. When there is not an acre of waste land from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean then, but

only then, will the pressure be lessened and the speed slacken. And what then? What is to be done when, from New York to San Francisco, the entire country is nothing but wheat, bacon, textiles, machinery, and skyscrapers? Nobody knows, nobody dares even to pause to put that question.

IV

A successful American business man told me that his brother-in-law was the vice-president of an important bank. In Europe, he said, a man who had attained such a position would be reasonably secure. Unless he were found guilty of some criminal act, unless he murdered or embezzled, his position was safe and he need only do his routine work from day to day to live in security ; it would even be possible for him to give a good deal of his active thought to other interests. But in America such a man is kept like a slave remorselessly on his treadmill. He has to show ever-increasing returns. " Get on or get under " is the ultimatum which is

delivered afresh every hour in every American business—to all and sundry. While those vast undeveloped natural resources remain to be exploited, there cannot be a single minute's rest for any business organization. Onwards from West to East, backwards from East to West the industrial tide races. The great Aryan migrations which filled Europe with their successive waves until the whole continent was packed and further movement was impossible was a slow and tranquil process compared with the frenzy which is filling America. And this frenzy may be seen as in a microcosm in New York.

As everybody knows, the streets over the greater part of New York have not names but numbers. Straight avenues

from First upwards run the length of the city from south (down town) to north (up town). They are crossed at right angles by streets running from the East River to the Hudson. Red and green lamps are placed on pillars at these intersections and by them the traffic is regulated. In broad daylight up until 2 a.m. these green and red lights are flashing in the streets. All the accidents—as a taxi driver explained to me—take place after 2 a.m. The crush and noise of the traffic in the midst of these flaring signals under towering sky-scrapers—each one of which can suddenly vomit from six to ten thousand people into the street—is terrifying because it is punctuated by a constant series of explosions. The whole of Manhattan Island is solid rock and it is being incessantly

blasted for underground subways or for building. Skyscrapers are continually being torn down and replaced by still higher ones. Twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty storied skyscrapers in turn have had their day, and now buildings a hundred stories high are projected. One night as I rolled along in a taxi with an American friend in the midst of the usual din on the way to a theatre a terrific explosion seemed to burst right under our feet. I expected taxi and contents to be blown sky-high and clutching a strap I breathlessly asked what was wrong; but my friend quite unconcerned said something about a new subway and went on talking. Then, suddenly, we turned into Broadway.

Only the pen of a Dante could adequately describe Broadway. I will be

sober and matter of fact. Imagine a thoroughfare broader than Piccadilly, miles long, running diagonally the whole length of New York, lined with sky-scrapers, and having at its middle a belt of light that blazes like a milky way in the comparative darkness of the rest of the city. At a distance of something less than half a mile apart rise the two greatest film palaces in the world : the Paramount and Roxy's. The Paramount, which is one of the newer type of recessed skyscrapers, has its upper stories illuminated by floods of concealed light, and this tapering mass silhouetted against the pale turquoise early summer sky is one of the sights of the city. On the sidewalks promenades the most cosmopolitan crowd in the world. The girls are all made up with scarlet lips and

ice-cream complexions to such a degree that beside them the usual London beauty chorus would appear insipid. They are terrifyingly smart and hard, but whether they are really as " hard-boiled " as they look I do not know. I suspect they are merely shallow and sentimental, nothing more. The greater proportion of New York's stenographers and clerks live alone or in couples in single or two-roomed apartments on the west side. Their world is that of the cinema ; they have no other, for New York is itself a " movie "-picture with nothing but squalor and riches, hard lights, and shadows, and the restless excitement of melodrama. The men who stroll and lounge, chewing gum, along the pavements are of every European race with a large majority of Jews. They may

have no bank balances but their teeth are full of gold. There are not many negroes here as they mostly stay in Harlem—an out-of-the-way district in the north between Central Park and Washington Heights.

V

New York is not America and that is true in a much more drastic sense than it is true to say that London is not England or even that Paris is not France. Provincialism is a curious quality that has never been perfectly understood by writers who are, of necessity, unprovincial. A great writer may be, like Thomas Hardy, a countryman and not a townsman ; but if he is a townsman he must be a capital townsman and not a provincial townsman. New York is less like a capital city of a country than is any other of the world's great capitals, and this is not wholly due to the fact that Washington is the political capital. If we were to imagine that

London only consisted of Piccadilly Circus, Shaftesbury Avenue and a dozen big hotels and some monster blocks of flats, then we should have a notion of the queer isolation of New York from the rest of the country, because the London that is linked with the rest of England lies outside the places I have mentioned, whereas New York seems to consist of offices, flats and hotels.

It is true that around Wall Street and in a few out-of-the-way corners relics of the America of Abraham Lincoln, of Emerson and Walt Whitman are to be found, but they are disappearing fast, and the real New York does not even know the names of Emerson or Walt Whitman. Perhaps this is just as well, for after all there is Boston and Boston always reminds an Englishman of Matthew Arnold—not

Matthew Arnold the exquisite poet of *Thyrsis*, *The Scholar Gypsy*, and *The Forsaken Merman*; but Arnold of the essays, the Arnold of "sweetness and light," those truly Bostonian virtues which the civilised world has to-day repudiated. Matthew Arnold himself said that the capital defect of life in America was that

> "compared with life in England it is so uninteresting, so without savour and without depth. And they think to prove that it must have savour and depth by pointing to the number of public libraries, schools and places of worship?"

But Matthew Arnold did not foresee the day when all that was most savoury would come from Harlem not Boston, when American writers and critics would

find the cultured Henry James as insipid and savourless as Attila and his hordes of Asiatic he-men found the Roman Horace. Indeed, there is at present taking place a barbarian invasion analogous to all the previous barbarian invasions of cultural centres in history. The Americanization of Europe is taking place under our very eyes and it offers the same spectacle of a young naïve, self-confident society overwhelming by sheer undiluted energy the more sophisticated, self-conscious and sceptical older cultures. But we may be sure that, as always, the barbarians lose their barbarism as fast as the cultured lose their culture. It is almost as if there operated in human society a law analogous to the second law of thermo-dynamics by which if a hot body and a cold body are brought

together they interchange to a common mean temperature; so every barbaric invasion results in a lowering of the standard of culture which is, as it were, averaged down. Nevertheless there is a contrary influence in human society, that which creates culture, and every year this influence is perhaps making the barbarians themselves less barbarous even in their own country. I say "perhaps," because it is doubtful whether we can argue from past to future. Because the historical past seems to offer examples of societies advancing from a primitive to a higher culture this is not proof that such an advance must always happen. Nor can we be sure that in the place of every extinct or exhausted culture there will inevitably arise a new and equally good one.

Speculation on this subject is futile, it is perhaps useful, however, to perceive the changes that are taking place and to criticize them. Nobody can say exactly how far the Americanization of Europe will proceed, but it seems as if America is to-day influencing Europe more than Europe is influencing America. Our part has been played. The Americans are in a position—and it is we who have placed them in that position—to absorb and use all our cultural tradition whilst we now have to learn from our richer and stronger neighbours simply because they are richer and stronger. It is not wisdom that leads to strength and riches but the freedom from inhibitions. Wisdom gives us inhibitions, but to vary Blake's saying—the uninhibited and uninstructed tiger is some-

times worth more than the inhibited and instructed horse and to-day quite definitely is the day of the tiger. We do not see this side of America very clearly in New York, although this sky-scraping and wonderfully impressive city—the greatest architectural monument in the world since Athens, Rome and Venice—is a sign of the sheer uninhibited driving power in the continent behind it. The tiger does not seek to justify its appetite, it *is* its appetite. The Americans do not, or did not until quite recently, seek to justify their lust for material riches and power. It is perhaps only the rarer individuals in whom this lust can be satisfied who will be able to perceive its limitation, and the question is, will they be strong enough to impress their ideals, their further ideals, upon

society? Never before, perhaps, was the task of the minority so difficult because never before has there been such a variety of amusements and sensations for the populace. It is difficult to enlighten a drunken man, and in the modern city the populace seems to have nearly reached the stage of being permanently in dope and consequently inaccessible to reason or feeling.

VI

I was told I must go to the Paramount and Roxy's. I paid ninety-five cents—about four shillings—to enter the Paramount. Inside, the Paramount is a morgue of marble and mosaic. The hall, which looks like the bad dream of some Arabian madman, has two walls covered with the coats-of-arms of all nations and underneath each is affixed a small slab of stone or other material. A key to this display tells what each of these slabs is. Under the royal arms of Great Britain is a fragment from St. Paul's, under those of Scotland is a piece of stone from Edinburgh Castle, and so on. The corridors are embellished with original pictures

by America's academic artists. One might think one was at the Royal Academy show if it were not for the dimmer, more religious, light which suffuses these antechambers.

Then I entered the presence, America's Holy of Holies. The huge auditorium is in almost total darkness. There is a curious sensation of incense and the strange emotional hush characteristic of religious worship. Far away on a bright rectangle of light I saw the face of Dolores Costello, priestess of "Astarte," "Ashtoreth," "Ashtar-Chemosh," whom the Babylonians worship. An electric organ filled the temple with its murmuring; it grew louder and louder, crashing and storming upon the nerves until one's physical organization seemed to be disintegrated into shattering

vibration ; then it melted and grew softer and softer only to wax again louder and louder until the whole building filled with its throbbing. Synchronized with the unfolding of the drama, the waves of sound and light played upon the senses of the mute and expectant congregation. One had either to abandon oneself passively to the excitement or go out. I got up from a deep softly cushioned seat and escaped from that heavily drugged atmosphere into the streets, where I sucked in the open air and looked up in astonishment at the sky.

But the air was not fresh. Every city has its characteristic smell, and the smell of New York is a blending of ice-cream and patchouli—a sickly mixture. I got into a tram and went miles and miles

almost in a straight line down-town until I came to Number 1 Broadway, the offices of the International Mercantile Marine and the White Star line. Opposite me was the sea. I walked across a narrow strip of sordid grass and the waves of the Atlantic Ocean were at my feet. There were high-tiered ferry boats moving in every direction to Brooklyn and New Jersey, a great liner was coming in. It was a Saturday afternoon and scattered in groups over this small open corner of Manhattan Island were a number of dreary and vacant-eyed young men and women eating ice-cream or stolidly chewing gum. Not far away across the water rose the stumpy ungraceful Statue of Liberty. I was alone and would be alone all that evening and the next day. I felt like any

immigrant who might have just arrived in the Land of the Free, and, like any immigrant, I felt sick at heart and wondered what madness had brought me into the midst of this sordid and squalid wilderness of iron. For here the city was in its undress ; the skyscrapers rose in their naked emptiness, Wall Street was not far off, but the fever of human voices which gives it its week-day glamour was gone. Here there was no hope for the hungry immigrant, nothing but the stark reality, the bleak bare facts of steel and stone, witness to the automatic energy of a vast mob of one hundred million people rushing from East to West and from West to East and dotting the continent with these desolating ant-heaps.

Here, down-town, is the older part of

New York, where the streets still have names. To get back quickly up-town it is necessary to take the subway. You go underground. There is an office where you can get change and then, putting in a nickel (five cents), you pass through clanging turnstiles on to the platform. There are no ticket collectors nor porters. The turnstiles are in a constant uproar and their harsh clanging would jangle the nerves of any but the most robust. There are express and local trains, the express whizzes you through ten or twenty blocks of streets at a time. The carriages are small, cheaply fitted, sordid, and uncomfortable. You look across at a line of nondescript cosmopolitan faces indifferently chewing gum. Here are the immigrants unassimilated and free. In the

down-town districts through which you are now passing you would find streets where you would hear hardly a word of English. In such a street I saw a school and a notice "Prepare for your English examination"; boys were playing a ball game in the middle of the street, a curly-headed negro of ten or eleven held a stick and a young Italian was bowling.

At the Grand Central Station I got out. From this station trains go to all parts of America, but the station is underground and the railways are underground until they emerge on bridges or the mainland. The great marble hall of the station is a wonderful sight. Here you may see every type and degree of American. A posse of negro porters lounge and stroll nonchalantly about. I hesitate, and think I

will go up into the street through the Commodore Hotel, a skyscraper whose foundations are implicated with those of the Grand Central Station. I ascend a flight of steps and I am in the lounge of the " Commodore."

The lounges of the great American hotels are the meeting places of the middle-classes. In the lounges of such hotels as the " Commodore," the " Biltmore," the " Roosevelt," well-dressed men and women who are not residents are always idly sitting. They seem to have none of that unpleasant feeling of sham respectability which afflicts such people in a London hotel, and so the complementary sense of the disreputable is also missing. It is assumed that you have the money to pay for what you want—if you want

anything—and the sense to behave with outward decorum. Nothing more is asked of you, you are in a free country. It is this seeming total absence of surveillance, of interference, of criticism implicit or explicit which gives to such a city as New York its queer attractiveness. There is in New York no public opinion, no curiosity. The complete impersonality of the big hotel and the big store where no one watches you to see that you spend something is very soothing. The public rooms are really public. You may write letters, telephone, telegraph, interview friends, do business, live most of the day and night in a hotel, using it as if it were your club, without spending a cent that goes into the pockets of the proprietors, who provide these free anterooms as a

setting to their spending departments, knowing that the public which uses the one will sooner or later use the other.

I had been told I must see the lounge of the "Commodore," which was quite near the club where I lived; when I entered I thought I had been transported into the heart of a semi-tropic forest. Ferns and flowers grew up everywhere and between great banks of foliage brightly-clad women looked like huge and even stranger flowers, while all the time the air was filled with the trilling of innumerable canaries suspended everywhere in cages. It was an extraordinary scene and characteristic of the vivid exotic unreality of New York.

That evening as I stood more than twenty stories high upon the roof of the

Yale Club and looked across East River I saw a sight even more unreal. The skyscrapers were slender pinnacles of light, across the river crawled in every direction ferry-boats that were just many-tiered electric palaces, and Brooklyn was one vast blaze netted with dark lines glittering beside the water. I remembered being told that they were planning Chicago for a population of one hundred millions, and I wondered what New York would look like in those days when a thousand million people are scurrying to and fro within the United States.

VII

Nobody has ever prophesied about the future with success. Certain writers have foreseen inventions, not absolutely new inventions but developments along the lines of current inventions. This is the most that has ever been done. In order to realize the narrow limits of our inventing power we have only to try to imagine the fashions in women's clothes, or hair-dressing five years ahead, or to conceive in detail a successful theatrical revue at a popular theatre ten years in advance. If Emerson or Nathaniel Hawthorne or Lowell were to be suddenly brought back to life in the New York of to-day it would appear as strange and unfamiliar to them as to an

ancient Roman. There have been in the past whole centuries where cities and their inhabitants have changed less than New York has changed in fifty years, and this sudden acceleration of change is certainly not a final alteration of the *tempo* at which "progress" is taking place, but is merely the beginning of a new era. There may be some strict connection between the average speed of locomotion for persons and goods and the time taken to change habits and fashions. The invention of steam railways and steamships a hundred years ago increased the speed of locomotion from a maximum of fifteen miles an hour to an average of fifty miles an hour, and during the last hundred years fashions and habits have changed about four times as quickly as during the previous hundred years.

But it is only twenty years ago (1909) since Louis Bleriot first flew across the English Channel, a distance of about thirty miles, in thirty-eight minutes; since when the Atlantic has been crossed and a speed of a couple of hundred miles an hour is a commonplace matter. We may therefore expect that during the next hundred years the habits and fashions of the civilized world will change with five times the rapidity of the changes during the past hundred years. It is in this way that we can help ourselves best to realize how different the world of 2029 will be. If we, who seem to ourselves so advanced, so terribly modern and up-to-date, could be suddenly put forward into the New York or London of 2029 we should gape with greater astonishment than any

country bumpkin who had never seen a town has ever gaped at London or New York. But these changes may be so entirely novel that London and New York may not even exist any longer, or may be isolated and deserted ruins or carefully preserved ancient monuments. For the one thing that can be predicted about the future (from past history) is that it is not a mere extension or development of the past on a larger or greater scale but something quite inconceivably new. Even a Napoleon—who in his most speculative moments might have imagined better roads and more accurate and quicker-firing guns—could not have imagined fleets of bombing aeroplanes. So, although it is possible for me to predict that in much less than a hundred years from now one will be able

to speak to any person in any part of the world by just taking a wireless receiver and transmitter out of one's coat pocket, yet it is absolutely impossible for me to imagine the completely new marvels that will be commonplace then. Perhaps the emotions and thoughts of men and women will show less change than anything else, but nothing is further from the truth than the platitude that human nature does not change. Human nature does change and perhaps it is just here that the change during the next hundred years will be greatest. No European can meet with numbers of young Americans without realizing that they are strikingly different in many ways from their European cousins. This difference is far more striking in the women than in the men at present, but

that is because the women have made greater use of their new "freedom" in America than in Europe. There are many people, chiefly among the intelligentsia, who pretend (and nearly all their statements are a pretence) to think this "freedom" destructive of sex and they raise rhapsodies to an incarcerated and haremic femininenes. They say they want women to be secret, aloof, mysterious, submissive and seductive, but it is this erotic "idea," not woman, that interests them.

Personally I think the women of America show a definite advance in human quality. Perhaps something has been sacrificed, but I am convinced that it is only a temporary sacrifice and that the world will move further and further away from the Latin attitude to women without

any final loss in the balance and harmony between feminine and masculine qualities.

In New York I met several of those extremely cultivated and intelligent women, less rare in America than elsewhere, who have opinions of their own and do not merely echo the opinions of the set to which they belong. To my American friends I was an out-of-the-way visitor on a slightly mysterious errand—an agent for Haig's whisky perhaps, or in the Bolshevik secret service, or sent by W. R. Morris to buy out Henry Ford, at any rate a gentleman very much incognito. So, in the course of conversation, they talked quite frankly, as they might have done to an American friend—about English writers visiting New York. I found myself suddenly listening to criticism

whose devastating candour made me outwardly blush, and inwardly thankful that I had not tried to earn a single penny while I was in America by writing or lecturing.

For it appears that the Americans in private look upon almost all English writers as poverty-stricken individuals who visit their country solely because they are "on the make." Naturally extremely hospitable, they have seen their hospitality not only taken for granted almost as a natural right and tribute to English superiority, but outrageously abused. Guests who have been invited to stay for a few days have calmly stayed weeks, others invited for weeks have stayed months. Nearly all have expressed astonishment when staying with private people if their hosts'

automobiles have not been waiting at the door from dawn until past midnight to carry them about. For the first time, I understood and sympathized with the American attitude to our war debts. It is the attitude of a rich man to a poor man who, when he is not frankly borrowing money from him, is sponging on him indirectly. The Americans are so polite that it is quite impossible to discover from their manner whether one is boring them or not, and it is so difficult for an Englishman not to imagine himself among the savages and barbarians on the outskirts of our Empire when he is in America that it is, perhaps, understandable that he never realizes how frequently he bores Americans.

VIII

The Englishman who is slightly pompous and stilted in London becomes automatically one hundred per cent. more pompous and stilted in New York. He behaves thus because he has swallowed the absurd legend that Americans are less educated, less cultivated, and less intelligent than we are. It would be well for every Englishman visiting New York to assume the contrary ; besides, it happens to be nearer the truth. The following story which was told to me represents the typical English attitude which makes us ridiculous. A well-known English novelist and his wife were staying as guests with a well-known American hostess. At a party

given by this lady an American acquaintance of mine was present. After dinner the wife of the English novelist sang, and sang very indifferently, not to say badly. The applause was politely perfunctory, but more songs were proffered unrequested. The applause grew more perfunctory, whereupon the famous Englishman of letters, noticing this, remarked loftily: "Those songs are by Hugo Wolf and they take some understanding." I know the name of the novelist in question, and I am certain that he would never have made such a remark in Paris, Berlin, Rome, or London; but so strongly are some of us under the illusion that Americans are wild and woolly Western barbarians that we become completely fatuous as soon as we step ashore

at New York. My American friends declared that most English authors lecturing in America become so pompous that their voices stick in their throats. Even the most intelligent of English writers are occasionally led astray. One of the most brilliant of our younger novelists remarked to me last year: "The Americans treat Europeans as if they were superior beings, *which indeed they are.*"

Of course, we have not been without excuses for such opinions. Americans have often shown a lamentable lack of discrimination and have rushed after our inferior and ignored our better writers. But does our English public not do this? The mob everywhere is the same, it is only the few who are different—and the ratio of that few to the many.

Judging from what I saw and heard on the other side of the Atlantic, it is England, not America, which is likely in the course of the next fifty years to become a backwater in which the stream of tradition and culture has become lost and stagnant. Numbers of contemporary French, Italian, German, and Spanish books are even now translated directly by American writers and published in New York before they appear in England, if they ever do so. And it is not true to suggest that here people read them in the original language. Far more Americans than English read and talk French and Italian fluently. There are far more Americans than English travelling every year in Europe. The annual pilgrimage from New York to Cherbourg is largely a pilgrimage of young

people athirst for knowledge and experience; it is not, as with us, mainly made up of successful old men and rich women acquiring health expensively on the Riviera.

And the conventional idea that American women are either shallow, smart and devoid of all culture or garrulous blue-stockings is wide of the mark. The best description of the young American girl in our literature is in a wholly forgotten but excellent novel by Laurence Oliphant entitled *Altiora Peto*, published more than forty years ago. Laurence Oliphant was the Aldous Huxley of his age, and he saw the American young woman with a fresh unbiased but critical eye, and he saw that she was very good. Her chief handicap is her harem. No

sound civilization can be built up when one of the two sexes is confined in a harem. "Let the men out of the harem!" should be the slogan of America; and once this is achieved, then the possibilities of America for a great cultural future that will surpass that of Egypt, Greece, or the European Renaissance are great indeed.

For in America, as elsewhere, the original creative activity comes only from men. The circulation of the *American Mercury*—which is perhaps the greatest civilizing influence in the country—is about one hundred and ten thousand. This is about twenty times the circulation of any comparable English magazine, although America's population is only two and a half times ours. Of this 110,000 perhaps 100,000 are women, and the same

proportion holds good for all the best American magazines and reviews. But the *American Mercury* is the creation of two men—H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan—and I think we have here in microcosm the ratio between the creative minority and the assimilating majority which holds good for the entire American population.

The great disparity between the circulation of good magazines and reviews in America and in this country is in itself proof of the great intellectual liveliness of the New World. For, even if we allow that a higher percentage of Americans are born fools who by accident, habit or snobbery read what they don't understand, we are still left with a greater number of intelligent readers in proportion

to the population there than here. Nor are the American newspapers worse than ours, they are only different. They exploit sensations with more virtuosity, but they don't try to make everything sensational as our newspapers do.

These reflections occurred to me as I sat in the dining room of a charming lady who had told me an amusing story at our national expense which I am not permitted to relate here. I had been critical of New York, but in a burst of sudden enthusiasm I expressed my expectations of the future greatness of America. At that moment I heard a carillon: "That is Rockefeller's church," she said, "it is just opposite me in Park Avenue and on Sundays it goes all day long but, thank heaven, they are going to move it."

"What, the church?" I inquired. "Yes, they are building another in a skyscraper on Riverside Drive." "What is Rockefeller Junior like?" I asked. "Too awful," she replied, and then she told me of the Criticism Club to which she belonged, and I slowly saddened, for I was now hearing about a seamy side of America which I will not describe as it has been described *ad nauseam* and with the greatest gusto by English writers. But I have something to say about another church.

IX

Through one of his daughters—once again the initiative and enterprise came from woman—I met one of the best and most successful of American architects. He lived in one of the three greatest of American cities and employed a staff of eighty draughtsmen and architects. We travelled together from New York to Cherbourg and we talked for hours every day. As an ignorant layman, I asked him why it was that skyscrapers could not be built of glass and steel, eliminating all brick and other material. The explanation, of course, was the lack of elasticity in glass. All skyscrapers sway laterally in the wind and so any substance as brittle

as glass would splinter into fragments. But perhaps cheap elastic glass or some similar translucent substance may be found, and then we should have those cities of amethyst, diamond, and turquoise which have been described by Hebrew poets dreaming of a New Jerusalem.

In the meantime, the Germans are busy experimenting with a method of building rigid structures of any height. If sky-scrapers could be built absolutely rigid the whole art of building would be transformed. But these were not the matters which perturbed my American friend. He had other troubles. He used to sit day after day, the centre of a knot of American business men—the sort of men who in the evening paid £40 or £50 for a ticket in the daily pool on the boat's run,

winning or losing with equanimity. He talked and they listened. He was a short, thick-set man of forty-seven with thick greying dark hair, a humorous mouth and imaginative eyes—not at all the American type with its large jaw and cold, pebble-eyed lifelessness. His ancestors had originally come from France about a hundred and fifty years ago and he was the architect of his own fortune (as well as of innumerable skyscrapers), having risen from comparative poverty.

Like most good men, he was terribly overworked and every few years had to rush away to Europe to avoid a break-down. For the first two days on board he would sleep twenty hours out of the twenty-four, then he would emerge, drink a bottle of champagne and be recuperated,

brimming with vitality and ideas. He complained to me that his clients and business friends all said to him: "Don't think; what is the good of it? Why worry?" For this man—who was consulted on all sides and had in his power the distribution of millions of dollars of contracts annually, since he was quite unable even with his staff of eighty to take on more than a fraction of the work offered to him—this very rich and successful architect wanted to be a second Michelangelo and to rival the builders of the Pyramids. He dreamed of constructing great and original works of art that would answer all the requirements of the America that was to come and would last for thousands and thousands of years. Just as Phidias recreated Greece in the Parthenon

and the builders of the Pyramids embalmed there the spirit of Egypt, so he wished to construct before he died the spirit of America in eternal silhouette against the sky. He was an ambitious man.

But none of his clients shared these dreams of his, and, although in Chicago men might talk glibly about planning the city *now* for a future population of one hundred millions, his clients all complained when he declared that he wanted more time to think out his designs: "Why think? Why bother? We only want the building to last twenty years, the capital will then be amortized and we can pull the damn thing down." *Pull the damn thing down.* What words to comfort an architect, a twentieth-century Phidias or Michelangelo at his daily task! No

wonder he should grow haggard with thought ! no wonder he should be driven —not by education, not by a mere dead high-brow traditional snobbery, but by the radical instinct of self-preservation— to reflect and criticize the civilization in which he was entoiled, a civilization which condemned all his labour and thought, his very creative soul to almost immediate and utter extinction !

So I sat and listened to this man's bitter denunciations to the business men around him of the fatuousness of their blind aimless destructivity. Then one day he told us about the church : the new Episcopalian Church that was to be built in New York for which unlimited millions were to be poured out like so much water. The new church in which New York

society would sit and listen to sermons about Lindbergh or whatever happened to be the topic of the hour ; but whose prestige was already in danger because too many Jews were demanding admission. A committee had been appointed to look after the building of this church, and after long deliberation a body of architects had been chosen. They were given a free hand, and they were sent to tour Europe and Asia for ideas. Here in the capital of the New World the multi-millionaire rulers of one hundred million people were going to erect regardless of expense a building that would be a credit to everybody. And, after due deliberation, the architects produced their plan which was unanimously accepted, accepted with applause. And one would have imagined

that this plan was beneath the power of any human brain to conceive. It was this : to reproduce in miniature with absolute accuracy in the finest material the cathedral of Chartres. " Chartres in a lemon-squeezer ! " laughed my American architect derisively. This miniature Chartres will, in due course, be erected up-town in New York, and it will probably be the only building in New York destined to survive the next hundred years, for who will want to pull it down ? A sixty story skyscraper can be replaced by a hundred story skyscraper. Steel and cement may be replaced by a metal as light as air and a material as transparent as glass ; but what can replace a church but another church ? And, as the Episcopalian verities have been enshrined for all time

perfectly and finally in Chartres, there is nothing to be done but scrupulously to reproduce Chartres. This decision made by a representative committee of millionaires and architects is really an expression of transcendental logic. But why, it may be asked, did they not decide to build Chartres in exactly the same size as the original, or much larger? Ah, here we have an example of the impeccable taste of Americans. A larger Chartres would be vulgar. An equal Chartres would be silly. A miniature Chartres is choice and exquisite. Moreover, it accords with the gradual shrinking of the congregations of the Episcopalian Church: it is a symbol of the religion which, founded on the rock of Peter, has shrunk into a perfect crystal upon the rock of Manhattan.

Postface

Only a fraction of the impression received during a journey to a strange country can be retained and of all the ideas that chase one another through the mind it is not necessarily the most interesting that one succeeds in recording. One may make many generalisations about America and each of them may be true, even when they are contradictory. A friend of mine says that in America we find that last degeneration of the human race, the men of whom Nietzsche wrote : " Sie haben das Glück gefunden und blinzeln," which is to say that the Americans have found

complete happiness and satisfaction in material prosperity and standardised activity. For them there are no problems (except material ones); they see no reason why everyone should not be happy and contented. To suffer and to be dissatisfied are to them synonymous with failure. This naive and alarming optimism goes with a practical method of following the line of least resistance which is essentially democratic. But such a democracy can only be based on prosperity; when the majority cease to be prosperous; when this "happiness" disappears and they have no longer a supply of toys at which to "blinzeln" like excited children, then the social order can only hold together by moral or physical compulsion. The supply of "dope" has given out and

necessity takes its place. And one may say of a nation, as of an individual, that it is only adult when necessity (inner or outer, spiritual or physical) takes the place of the various forms of self-distraction which enable one to remain infantile, irresponsible and semi-conscious among the herd.

I do not see how America can ever become poor materially. During the next hundred years we are more likely to see an increased production of wealth—Europe and America going together with a slowly decreasing population. However prosperous the population of Europe and America may seem to be in comparison with the population of a hundred years ago, the next hundred years will, in my opinion, show an even greater and more

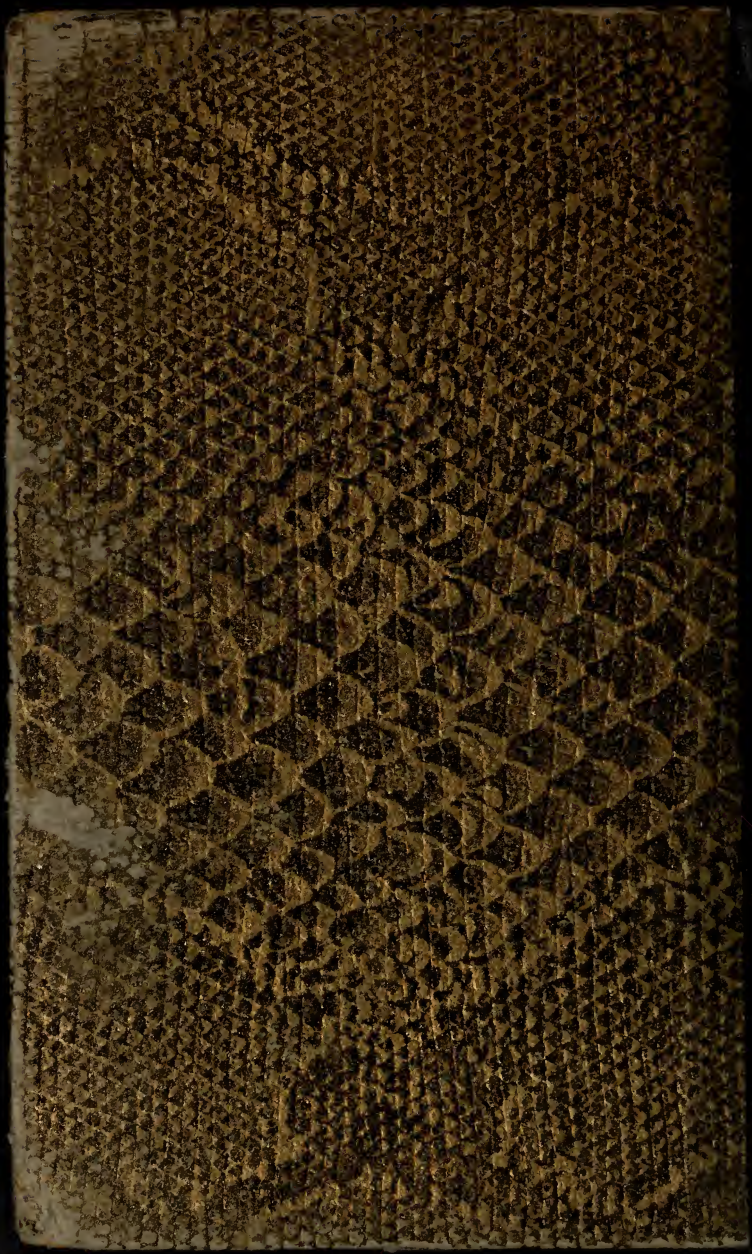
rapid increase in material wealth. If this is true then necessity will enter elsewhere —unless we are to believe that the human race has already reached its zenith and can only thereafter decline. A new moral compulsion must—as I see it—take the place of the old necessity. For I cannot believe that Americans will remain in a state of infantile imbecility upright (not prostrate) with self-flattering satisfaction and adoration before their own wealth and find themselves completely expressed in their own material activity. The severest critics of Americans are to-day Americans, and if ever Europe became Americanised then by that time we should discover that America itself had ceased to be American and was precisely the country where the conflict between inner ideals

and outer distractions had become most real and incessant. The present idealistic hypocrisy of America is not a bad sign, it is merely a sign of childishness. The symbols of the past, of the adult past, of the human race—fruits of age-long conflict between the great men of the past and their environment—are upon the lips and in the books of all Americans. But, like children, they don't understand the meaning of the words they read, because they have not got the experience which gives these words meaning. To them they are merely words and ideas apprehended by the intelligence and the intelligence may use them in any way it pleases to suit the real feelings which they *have* experienced —feelings of greed, of material ambition, of crude delight in power, of pleasure in

all the different sensations of dope-taking, etc., etc.

But other desires must be present, however latent, feeble or obscure, in the American breast. And these are so much the stronger that they must in the end triumph. One must agree, however, that this can only be an unverifiable personal belief. It may be the destiny of the human race to become standardised upon a level lower than that to which exceptional individuals have attained. There is no comprehensible theory of evolution which even suggests that man is susceptible of further, to say nothing of infinite, progress. We do not know the meaning of "progress," nor do we know that great and exceptional men will continue to be born. It is to be presumed, however, that it is unlikely

that the human race will become satisfied with its condition while the average human being is below the level to which some human beings have in fact reached. It is in the struggle to equal these exceptional individuals that all individuality is achieved. Without them the human race would sink into myriads of undifferentiated men. But I see no sign that this will happen even in America.

W.J.T.

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